

Considering Security Window Film to Protect Your School Glass?

Important Facts for Decision Makers to Know

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Protecting schools and campuses from active shooter and forced entry continues to be a critical initiative for school leaders, parent groups, and administrators whose primary responsibility is to keep children and staff safe while maintaining a comfortable learning environment.

Since Sandy Hook, a torrent of security products and suppliers have inundated school officials who often struggle with fully understanding which of these critical upgrades should be prioritized. Limited budgets, forward leaning parent groups, grant request deadlines, and stressed-out teachers and students also add a level of complexity to the decision process for those responsible to keep our schools safe.

As President and CEO of Window Film Depot and Impact Security, LLC, I've spent years working within this dynamic to help serve our communities by helping decision makers understand the features and benefits, costs, and best practices associated with protective glazing retrofits for schools.



Sandy Hook, CT. Attack Access Point

A popular 'first choice' recommended by security professionals and resource officers is the installation of security glazing to help "keep the bad guy outside" in order to minimize the damage caused by these attacks. It is critical to school safety that the motivated attacker does not gain entrance into the school building. Tactically, the challenge to diffuse the situation escalates dramatically once the attacker gains entrance into your building.

As a layer of protection designed to reduce this threat, the installation of security window film on your existing window and door glass is an effective and affordable part of any safety plan under consideration.

Security window films are clear sheets of PET (plastics) that can range from 8-24 millimeters in thickness, with aggressive mechanical adhesives that create a strong bond with the existing glass surface. These surface-applied films are UV coated and are available in tinted versions for solar control when sun or heat is also a problem needing to be addressed.

Most security window films are installed on the interior of window and door glass and are designed to 'control glass failure' when windows are impacted by either manmade or natural forces against the glass surface. Much like the laminated glass in the windshield of cars, security window film will hold glass in place, control glass fragmentation, and deny entry into a space for a discreet amount of time under continuous assault.

The length of time of the attack denial capability of the film is determined by the aggressiveness of the attacker, the quality of the film and film installation, and the existing conditions of the door and window framing system.

Important points to consider:

1. Security window film is designed to 'slow down' a physical attack on window and door glass.

Properly installed, administrators can expect that security window films will help keep an attacker at bay for 30-60 seconds on the outside of the building. This critical period will allow administrators the time needed to implement other security measures and call on law enforcement for help.

2. Security window film is not bulletproof.

There are no window film security products on the marketplace that are bullet proof. Unfortunately, the internet is full of misleading information on this subject, creating confusion for decision makers. For substantial ballistic resistance, window and door glass needs to be retrofit in a much more robust manner. Solutions including thicker polycarbonates and glass-clad materials are required for effective ballistic resistance but are cost prohibitive for most school systems.

3. Entry doors, sidelights and lobby glass should be the priority.

When assessing for the most effective installation of security window films, consider all the doors and surrounding glass on the ground level of your building first. These areas are the primary attack points for active shooters and require the most attention in any security upgrade.

4. Elementary schools first

Our most vulnerable need to be protected first. Start your security window film upgrade program at your elementary schools. One of the tenants of effective counter measures in an active shooter situation is to "fight back". Older children have a better opportunity to protect themselves by attacking the attacker in extreme situations.



Polycarbonate Solution Point

5. All security films are not created equally.

With the greater awareness of active shooter events across the US over the past 10 years, many new players have entered the market. Some of these new companies have been making dubious claims about the performance expectations of their security laminates / films / retrofits. When choosing a security film, make certain the products have been independently tested and are from a reputable US based manufacturer, like 3M.

6. Security window films should be "attached" to the window or door frame.

A proper and effective security window film installation will include both the PET (plastic) film being mounted on the glass and an "anchoring" caulk that affixes the window film to the existing window or door frame. Improperly installed "anchoring caulking" is the number one failure point for these retrofit glazing security film systems when put under repeated force.

7. Installation and contractor quality is more important than product choice.



Proper Anchoring Caulking Bead

Your window film contractor should be recognized as an expert in the security glazing field and should be aware of all the retrofit glazing solutions in the market including films, polycarbonate solutions, and ballistic glass. Make sure the contractor has 10 years of experience or longer working with these products. This will ensure that the decision maker has been introduced to the knowledge of all the possible retrofit glazing solutions in the market. Having a knowledgeable contractor will help demystify the universe of these important products and clarify what are the best options that meet your threat level and budget.

8. Consider 'phased' contracts ensuring the best pricing from your contractor.

A good security window film and protective glazing contractor should be like minded in the goal of securing as many window and door openings as possible to help protect our children. By partnering with a contractor long term, the best pricing can be secured for your project for both labor and materials allowing you to maximize your budget while securing as many at-risk windows as possible and doors across your school system.

BulletShield by DefenseLite



About the Author Jeff Franson is a recognized industry leader and innovator in the retrofit safety glazing industry. As CEO of Window Film Depot and Impact Security, LLC his companies have secured thousands of windows and doors in school systems across the US. Window Film Depot is a three-time 3M National Dealer of the Year and an MHEC contract holder.